



NEWS RELEASE

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District Attorney Jackie Lacey's Conviction Review Unit Exonerates Los Angeles Man

Los Angeles County District Attorney Jackie Lacey today announced the release from prison of Ruben Martinez Jr., a man wrongfully convicted in 2008 for a series of armed robberies in Boyle Heights.

A claim sent to the District Attorney's Conviction Review Unit set the wheels in motion for prosecutors and investigators to unearth new evidence that led to Martinez's exoneration.

"This case — brought to our attention by an inmate who was not represented by an attorney — is a powerful example of why we need dedicated conviction review units," District Attorney Lacey said.

"Although the vast majority of convictions are correctly upheld, I knew that, at times, the pursuit of justice is not perfect," District Attorney Lacey continued. "And Mr. Martinez's case serves as a stark reminder to all of us: Despite our best efforts, we don't always get it right."

At a hearing today, Los Angeles County Superior Court Judge William Ryan vacated Mr. Martinez's conviction, permanently released him from prison, dismissed his case with prejudice and found him factually innocent of the crimes for which he was convicted.

The District Attorney's Office not only lost faith in his conviction but also was convinced Mr. Martinez is, in fact, innocent of the crimes.

Martinez became a suspect in a string of unsolved armed robberies that took place between December 2005 and May 2007 at the same auto body shop in Boyle Heights.

Bearing a striking resemblance to the perpetrator, eyewitnesses identified him as the assailant and, at trial, his alibis were not fully presented, leaving the 12-person jury convinced of his guilt.

Jurors convicted Martinez of nine counts of second-degree robbery in the retrial of case BA323642. The first trial ended with the jury voting 9-3 in favor of a guilty verdict.

Martinez, however, remained resolute in his innocence.

Over the years, he had sought his freedom through a series of appeals, but those claims were denied.

After learning of the formation of the Conviction Review Unit, he and his wife, Maria, contacted the District Attorney's Office with claims of his innocence based on alibis that were not fully explored at the time of his trial. They said he was at work when two of the crimes were committed.

With Martinez's claim in hand, deputy district attorneys assigned to the unit closely examined the evidence and found that there was, in fact, merit to the claim.

District Attorney investigators then undertook the task of essentially re-opening the investigation. They painstakingly tracked down witnesses and uncovered employment records and paystubs that confirmed Martinez could not have committed two of the robberies that were clearly the work of the same serial robber.

On Nov. 1, Deputy District Attorney Andrea Bouas asked the court to release Martinez from custody on his own recognizance. He was released the following Tuesday.

"When I envisioned this unit, my hope was to make the conviction review process available not only to attorneys or innocence projects but also to the inmates themselves," District Attorney Lacey said.

Martinez's case marks the first time an inmate who was not represented by an attorney has been exonerated in Los Angeles County using this conviction review process.

District Attorney Lacey established the office's first Conviction Review Unit in 2015 as part of her commitment to innovative criminal justice reform.

"We as prosecutors have a legal obligation and an ethical mandate to ensure that the right person is convicted for the crime as charged and that the wrong person is never faced with defending against unjust charges," District Attorney Lacey said.

"For that reason, whenever we receive new credible information that may exonerate a person, the responsibility is on us, as prosecutors, to re-examine the facts and, when appropriate, to vacate a wrongful conviction."

Since its inception, the Conviction Review Unit has received more than 1,900 wrongful conviction claims. While most of those claims have not met the eligibility criteria, the unit closely examined 350 cases and maintains confidence in those convictions.

This is the third conviction that has been vacated since the unit was established; one sentence was reduced. Currently, there are 45 pending claims in various stages of the review process.

Requests to have a conviction reviewed must be submitted in writing to the Los Angeles County District Attorney's Office, Conviction Review Unit at 211 W. Temple Street, Room 1255, Los Angeles, CA 90012. Claims also may be emailed to: CRU@da.lacounty.gov

Claim forms may be found on the office website at <http://da.lacounty.gov/operations/cru>.

[About the Los Angeles County District Attorney's Office](#)

Los Angeles County District Attorney Jackie Lacey leads the largest local prosecutorial office in the nation. Her staff of nearly 1,000 attorneys, 300 investigators and 800 support staff members is dedicated to protecting our community through the fair and ethical pursuit of justice and the safeguarding of crime victims' rights.